



**Perspectives on Ethnicity
and the Environment
in American Studies**

**24th International Colloquium of American
Studies & Biennial Conference of the Czech and
Slovak Association for American Studies**

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

**Czech and Slovak
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for American Studies**



Ostrava 2023

INTRODUCTION

This booklet contains abstracts of papers which will be presented at the 24th International Colloquium of American Studies/the Biennial Conference of the Czech and Slovak Association for American Studies. The conference, held on 5-6 October, 2023, is organized by the Czech and Slovak Association for American Studies and is hosted by the University of Ostrava and generously co-sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Prague.

The 24th International Colloquium of American Studies will focus on the interactions of diverse people in the United States with the environment and will feature contributions from literary scholars, historians, political scientists, and scholars of (popular) culture not only from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, but also from Austria, Hungary, Poland, Taiwan, and the United States.

The conference organizers are happy to welcome the following keynote speakers, whose lectures will address some of the key issues discussed at the conference:

- Jay Fiskio (Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, USA)
- Sarah D. Wald (University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA)

Organizing Committee:

Jan Beneš (main organizer)

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Stanislav Kolář (University of Ostrava, Ostrava, Czech Republic)

Jan Beneš (University of Ostrava, Ostrava, Czech Republic)

Ostrava, October 2023

KEYNOTE LECTURES

Speculative Maroonage and Black Agrarian Futures

Jay Fiskio

Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, USA

Black agrarian futures are at the center of recent works of speculative fiction, Jocelyn Nicole Johnson's novella *My Monticello* and the Black Dawn series by adrienne maree brown. In these novels, through agrarianism that reclaims the plantation and maroonage that creates a fugitive space in the interstices of the plantation landscape, Black communities resist and escape white supremacy. Imagining a future of collective action and resistance, where Black descendants occupy the plantation, *My Monticello* centers the daily labor of gleaning, foraging, growing, and cooking. These practices, first developed at Monticello by enslaved peoples, evidence the ways that Black ecologies are essential to disrupting the trajectories of the plantation. Alternatively, maroonage operates as a liberated site that exists alongside the plantation while remaining apart. There are two aspects of maroonage that are especially significant in thinking through Black futures. The first is that maroons relied on ecological knowledge and capacity to create sanctuary areas that European settlers feared and misunderstood, such as swamps and bayous. The second aspect I want to think about is how, through this process of inhabitation, maroons engaged in *world-making*. adrienne maree brown's novels *Grievors* and *Maroons* take up precisely this worldmaking project to imagine an urban maroon society. Set in a near-future, post-pandemic Detroit, the remaining inhabitants of the city bring together traditions of Black organizing, the urban farming revolution, and alliance with the nonhuman world to create a space of autonomy that escapes white violence.

Environmental Justice Storytelling in Latinx Literatures and Cultural Production

Sarah D. Wald

University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA

Pleasure, joy, and environmental connection are as important to Latinx environmental justice storytelling as narratives of environmental violence, and yet, they have received far less attention. Stories that focus on Latinx outdoor leisure respond implicitly and at times explicitly to the ideological and material harms that Latinxs face in outdoor labor, such as farmwork and construction. I position Latino Outdoors's *Yo Cuento* blog as environmental writing to highlight the ways it challenges the structures of racial capitalism that attempt to reduce Latinxs to their productivity and labor identities. In celebrating Latinx leisure, blog contributors reclaim a pleasurable relationship to the environment disrupted by colonialism, immigration, and economic exploitation. The transmedia testimonios of *Yo Cuento* collectively produce a Latinx outdoor recreation identity that revels in a restful, unproductive, and shared (rather than possessive) relationship with the more-than-human world. As such, *Yo Cuento* provides a counternarrative to the intertwined material and ideological structures that result in both Latinx overrepresentation in outdoor labor and underrepresentation in outdoor leisure.

PRESENTATIONS

Masculinity, Boundaries, and Water in Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*

Simona Bajáková

Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia

Benjamin Alire Sáenz's novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, published in early 2012, received widespread acclaim for its authentic portrayal of blended identity among its young adult readership and literary critics alike and continues to be a genre favourite to this day. Set in the 1980s, partly reflecting the author's own experience growing up during the AIDS crisis, the book's focus on the hardship of queer Chicax youth remains relevant. Chicax people have long been subject to marginalization and discrimination in the US, including racial profiling, police brutality, and unequal access to education and employment opportunities. Many LGBTQ+ Chicax people face intersectional discrimination and become ostracised based on both their sexual orientation/gender identity and their race/ethnicity. Sáenz's novel tells a coming-of-age story of two friends Ari and Dante as they transcend ideas of traditional Chicax masculinity and blur the boundaries of friendship and romantic relationship. Through water imagery and the exploration of liminal spaces, Sáenz offers a provoking coming-of-age story that confronts topics such as intersectional identity, ethnic (gender) stereotypes, and self-recognition via the other.

The Convergence of Human and Non-Human in Karen Tei Yamashita's Novel *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*

Miloš Blahút

University of Prešov, Prešov, Slovakia

Karen Tei Yamashita's novel *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* centres in post-apocalyptic environment in the Amazonian rain forest, namely fictional Matacão, in which a strange plastic material attracts attention of scientists, and which symbolises the exploitation and ecological disaster of the area. As

plastic and nonbiodegradable materials, displaying magic-like proportions, can be fully recycled, at least in the fictional world, Yamashita proves that over the years humanity has created a close connection to non-human materials and lost touch with nature. This is depicted in the dystopian world in which food that is made from plastic is edible and perfectly healthy. Thus, Yamashita points at the humanity's loss of connection with nature and potential destruction exemplified by the eradication of most of the characters at the end of the novel due to bacterial infection. Humanity has learned to adapt to new surroundings and find ways of surviving in hostile environments, just as non-human environment transforms under anthropogenic changes, albeit in miraculous ways. However, the nature shows its dominance when humans seem to repeat their mistakes. Therefore, Yamashita's novel *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* in particular, and the genre of climate fiction in general, conveys themes that are overtly didactic.

“Scientific Work Sanctions Everything”: Czech Skull Hunters in Alaska

Mark A. Brandon

University of New York in Prague, Prague, Czech Republic

This talk will describe and analyze the journeys of Czech immigrant and scientist Aleš Hrdlička in Alaska in the 1920s and 30s. In Alaska, Hrdlička and colleagues like Czechoslovakian anthropologist Jiří Malý traveled from settlement to settlement measuring Native Americans and stealing skulls from sacred gravesites. Hrdlička was looking for osteological evidence to support his theory that Native Americans originally migrated to the Americas from Asia. Yet his quest for skeletal material and his interactions with living Native Americans reveal broader presumptions about science and racial identity. This talk will discuss Hrdlička's published *Alaskan Diary*, but it is also informed by direct study of Hrdlička's papers stored at the Smithsonian Institution's National Anthropological Archive in Washington, D.C.

Migration Narratives and Migration Policies: From DACA to the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection

Kateřina Březinová

Metropolitan University Prague, Prague, Czech Republic

In the last decade, the region that includes the US, Mexico and Central America has seen a surge in a large-scale migration. The caravans of Central American migrants gained in size and notoriety, thousands of Cubans tried to migrate via Central America to the US, while political developments urged many Nicaraguans do the same. Most of the migrants come from Guatemala and Honduras, yet many originate in Mexico, a country which has provided over the past six decades roughly a third of all newcomers to the US. Moreover, since 2014, more than 6 million Venezuelans have left their country. Beyond the size of these flows, their most distinctive feature has been the unprecedented share of unauthorized migrants.

This paper seeks to improve our understanding of contemporary migratory processes among Mexico, Central American countries and the US by considering ways in which discourses appertaining to migrants can be intertwined with the specific practices and policies. Specifically, the paper examines the role migration narratives have played in the construction of notions of racial and ethnic difference vis-a-vis US residents originating in Mexico and Central America.

Secondly, it has been acknowledged that narratives influence migration policy in powerful ways (Boswell et al., 2011). To this end, a sample of migration policy initiatives, such as DACA from 2012 and the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection from 2022, is analysed with an ambition to better comprehend how certain narratives become dominant, and how they spread throughout the government, private sector and civil society.

Pastoral and Anti-Pastoral Islands of Crime Fiction

Šárka Bubíková & Olga Roebuck

University of Pardubice, Pardubice, Czech Republic

In the introduction to their groundbreaking study of the presentation of islands in genre literature *Island Genres: Genre Islands*, Ralph Crane and Lisa Fletcher state that “islands have long been associated with paradise on the one hand, and prison on the other – a dichotomy that is exploited to good effect by many crime writers” (Crane & Fletcher, 2017, p. 6). Our presentation aims to explore if and how this traditional, pastoral depiction of the island still operates in contemporary crime writing. While it appears in P. D. James’s *The Lighthouse*, her 2005 novel following in the footsteps of the Golden Age of

detective fiction, we have identified anti-pastoral approaches in other recent British and American crime fiction. Using Peter May's *The Blackhouse*, Robert Harris's *The Ghost*, and Philip Craig's Martha's Vineyard mysteries, we will show how the contrast between pastoral and anti-pastoral depictions subverts the traditional understanding of island space. Because the British and American traditions of crime fiction have evolved in a mutual dialogue, our presentation employs a comparative approach.

Oscillations in Cormac McCarthy's Fiction

Zuzana Buráková

Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice, Slovakia

The ongoing discourse on postmillennial literature, globalization, and identity in Anglophone literatures highlights the tension between national or regional narratives and global literary representations. While there is a new world-space for cultural production and national representation that is becoming more globalized due to the movement of capital across borders, this space is also becoming more localized and fragmented. Cormac McCarthy's works usually center on universal human experiences instead of specific cultural or ethnic identities. Nonetheless, his fiction is a significant contribution to the discourse on environmental and climate change. McCarthy's literary identity presents a paradox in terms of regional affiliations. While some readers from the South regard him as the successor of Faulkner and O'Connor, others outside the region view him as a critic of the concept of Manifest Destiny in the American West. This tension becomes more significant with recent interpretations of his work that position him as a writer concerned with climate change, environmental issues, and bioregionalism. This re-evaluation of McCarthy's fiction is not only taking place within the American context but also in the context of the current global climate. Our study focuses on the use of borders and landscapes (both pastoral and anti-pastoral) in McCarthy's fiction to demonstrate the oscillation between local and global identities and the gradual transition of his fiction into the Anthropocene.

Jewish Jersey Juxtapositions: On the Farm and Back to Nature

James Deutsch

Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Washington, DC, USA

The stereotypical image of Jewish Americans is an urban (or sometimes suburban) dweller who actively participates in business, finance, law, and/or medicine. However, one of the lesser-known aspects of Jewish life in the United States is farming— especially to grow fruits and vegetables and to raise chickens and dairy cows. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jewish Americans established farming colonies in roughly half of the U.S. states. However, by the mid-twentieth century, most of those colonies had failed—with the exception of New Jersey, which Gabriel Davidson, in his article, “The Jew in Agriculture in the United States” (1935), termed “the cradle of the Jewish farm movement in the United States.”

Accordingly, this paper examines the history and significance of the Jewish farm movement in central and southern New Jersey, particularly during the early-twentieth century, when settlements originated for various reasons. Some settlements emerged from the same “back to the land” movement that also led to Jewish agricultural settlements in Palestine; some originated in socialist agrarian movements, promoted by Jewish immigrants from Russia; and some were established by Jewish immigrants from New York’s Lower East Side, who sought a closer communion with nature.

Based on writings from the settlers themselves, as well as the most significant secondary sources, this paper explores some of the juxtapositions between environmental concerns and American ethnic cultural traditions. A key concept is how Jewish farmers countered some of the stereotypes of Jewish existence while also vitally maintaining their ethnic and cultural identities.

Ecocritical and Metamodernist Perspectives in Postmillennial Vegan Documentaries

Petra Filipová

Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice, Slovakia

In the 21st century, veganism as a practice has become popularized across the Western world, particularly in Anglophone countries. Documentaries

exploring health concerns connected with the consumption of animal products as well as the environmental impact of meat and fishing industries, such as *Cowspiracy* (2014) and *Seaspiracy* (2021), or documentaries about the link between humans and non-human animals, such as *Earthlings* (2005) and *Unity* (2015), have undoubtedly contributed to this popularization. Presented as a lifestyle and an identity rather than merely a diet, “veganism constitutes a subject position that allows for environmentally responsible consumer choices that are viewed, particularly in the west, as oppositional to and disruptive of a capitalist system that is largely dependent upon big agriculture” (Wright, 2018, p. 727).

This paper strives to examine the narratives of veganism and animal product consumption presented in these documentaries from an eco-critical and metamodernist perspectives. How do these documentaries frame the narrative of the importance of veganism? Do they offer a route towards metamodernist oscillation “between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naivete and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity” (Vermeulen and van der Akker, 2010), or do they represent only one of the extreme positions of the metamodernist pendulum? And if the main concern of ecocriticism is “to give voice to ‘nature’ that has been silenced, as well as to other marginalised presences that are rendered voiceless due to the logic of the binaries which cast nature and culture as opposites” (Rangarajan, 2018), do these documentaries as cultural texts offer an alternative to the binary of nature vs. culture?

Shepard’s Native Americans and Their Spiritual Connection to the Natural World

Nela Hachlerová

Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

Sam Shepard, a well-known author of American myths, does not overlook the characters of Native Americans in his works. Shepard offers a powerful critique of American society and history while also celebrating the strength and spiritual richness of indigenous peoples. His treatment of Native American themes is often surreal and symbolic and is intended to address larger questions of identity and American culture. Shepard’s portrayal of Native Americans is usually focused on their deep spiritual connection with the

natural world and ancient wisdom. These characters are often juxtaposing modern American society and, on many occasions, guide the main protagonists in their search for identity.

In my presentation, I will examine Shepard's portrayal of the Native Americans as one with nature and their spiritual relationship to the land as opposed to the materialism of modern American society. I will also explore the role of these characters within the selected plays and their influence on the main protagonists. Ultimately, I will consider how the connection between Shepard's Native American characters and the land expresses cultural and environmental debates. This paper will draw on close readings of plays such as "Operation Sidewinder", "Angel City" and "The Holy Ghostly" since in these works the characters of Native Americans convey their metaphysical relationship to the world.

Keeping Your Head Above the (Dirty) Water: The Power of Water in Erika Dickerson-Despenza's *Cullud Wattah*

Andrea Holešová

University of Ostrava, Ostrava, Czech Republic

With more than half of its residents being African American and over 40% of local people living below the poverty line, the once prosperous "Vehicle City" of Flint, Michigan, has been experiencing serious economic problems which have affected particularly the already struggling African American community.

Following a change of drinking water supply source from Lake Huron to the Flint River, many households were exposed to lead and bacteria contamination between 2014 and 2019, which resulted in a dramatic increase in lead-poisoning-related health issues and possibly also in an outbreak of Legionnaire's disease. As the city authorities refused to address the crisis, the people of Flint were trapped in a poisonous environment - unable to move out due to the unfavorable real estate market and facing massive layoffs by the crucial local employer.

Even though environmental issues and systemic racism are commonly discussed in ethnic poetry and prose, they are not often paid attention to by African American playwrights. Therefore, Erika Dickerson-Despenza's Afro-surrealist play *Cullud Wattah* (the world premiere opened Off-Broadway in 2021) represents an original treatment of a current topic, as it deals with the

impact of the public health crisis on three generations of women of a working class African American family, who have their own ways of coping with the past, present as well as future.

The paper aims to explore the importance of water, as it does not represent just an existential necessity but also has a spiritual meaning – it cleanses the protagonists, washes away their secrets, and can bring salvation. Given all the obstacles the characters have to overcome, it is not clear whether the family will manage to keep their heads above the (dirty) water and “filter out the truth”.

Cowtown Flooded: Housing Segregation and Environmental Challenges in Fort Worth, 1940-1950

Zsófia Hutvágner

Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, USA

The Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area has emerged as one of the fastest-growing urban regions in the United States, yet the region remains underrepresented in urban historical scholarship. The proposed conference paper addresses this gap by examining the historical dynamics of housing segregation in Fort Worth and the effects of environmental factors on local society during the mid-twentieth century.

Fort Worth's history is emblematic of the wild west, boasting a rich cattle trading past, the subsequent industrial revolution spurred by the military industry, and a diverse population comprising African Americans, Mexicans, and other immigrant groups. Despite such developments, Fort Worth was heavily segregated into the late twentieth century. For example, racially restrictive covenants remained in use even after such instruments became legally unenforceable in 1948. At the same time, the city faced a severe housing shortage, the deteriorating condition of the existing housing stock, and a catastrophic flood of the Trinity River. The proposed paper explores the relationship between instruments of segregation, social belief about racial hierarchy, and the environment.

By examining Fort Worth's housing and environmental history, this paper aims to contribute to understanding urban development and social dynamics in twentieth-century Texas. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing housing segregation and environmental justice

issues in the context of urban planning and sustainable development in American cities.

Fueling Femi(ni)cide in Taylor Sheridan's *Wind River*

Tereza Jiroutová Kynčlová

Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

Taylor Sheridan's multiple series set in the American West are currently impacting U.S. popular culture and are linked to new social debates on constitutive parts of American national identity, such as the western genre, land (dis)possession, settler colonialism, racial and gender relations, as well as (Republican) politics. Sheridan's directorial debut *Wind River* (2017) shares some commonalities with the current production, but aims to center the issue of indigenous femi(ni)cides as a representative American issue. The movie's title card informs the audience that Native American women are the only demographic group for which no statistics on missing persons are maintained by the U.S. government. While the movie is traditionally catalogued as a detective story and/or a western, drawing on Griffiths (2018) and Dagget (2018), I suggest that analyzing the debut through the concepts of petrodrama and petromasculinity, respectively, allows for an in-depth critique of the racialized and gendered aspects of settler colonialist patriarchy in Anthropocene as well as the environmental impact of popular culture production. In the narrative, *Wind River* links the exploitation of racialized, indigenous women's bodies with the presence of extraction sites by geographical proxy on the one hand. On the other hand, for Griffiths, the movie's formal aspects, such as roaring snowmobiles and revving trucks as well as the unseen production of the movie, remind us on how heavily both the modern western genre and film industry depend on fossil fuels. The extraction industry is also associated with masculinity as a concept that controls strategic natural resources that are essential to a country's energy security, but also capitalist proliferation historically linked with expropriation of Native lands. Further, extraction sites have been linked to higher rates of criminality and especially to violent sexualized crimes targeting indigenous women (Deer 2015). The proposed paper will employ intersectional feminist perspectives, postcolonial and decolonial concepts pertaining to critiques of Western epistemology of representation of the Other to explore how the notions of petrodrama and

petromasculinity produce an ecofeminist interpretation of *Wind River* and the western genre.

Eugene O'Neill's Haunted Land- and Seascapes

Tomáš Kačer

Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

In his experiments with the Modernist dramatic form, Eugene O'Neill often employs the environment as an active participant of events in his plays. The land and the sea, together with natural phenomena such as the weather, daytime, and seasons of the year, present a symbolic landscape and seascape to the dramatic plot, as well as entities with their own agency and interaction with the characters. This vivid depiction of the environment is often labeled "suggestive realism", a typical feature of O'Neill's first half of his career, from the early plays to the American cycle plays of the late 1920s. This presentation will focus on O'Neill's innovative, experimental Modernist devices of employing environments as vehicles of collective and individual identities. It will illustrate O'Neill's concept of manifest history and identity, which find their presence in the environment of the landscape as associated with various collective American identities, including the Yankee self-sufficiency ideal (as in *Desire Under the Elms*), the Irish-immigrant peasant trope (*Beyond the Horizon*), and the racial/ethnic clash involving African Americans (*All God's Chillun' Got Wings*); the suggestive realism also enables to show a personal history as present in the living seascape (*Anna Christie*).

Urban Blight: Chicago's Pilsen in Stuart Dybek's Short Fiction

Izabella Kimak

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland

In this presentation I wish to analyze the setting of Stuart Dybek's short stories, especially those contained in his 1990 collection titled *The Coast of Chicago*. A native Chicagoan himself, the Polish-Czech-American Dybek devotes a lot of attention in his literary texts to the environment he grew up in, namely the area of Little Village/Pilsen on Chicago's South Side. Populated mostly by

immigrants of Polish and Czech background, the area is presented in quite affectionate terms as Dybek's young, male first-person narrators are frequently an alter ego for his own younger self. Filled with relatives, neighbors and friends, Pilsen definitely functions as home to the young protagonists. This notwithstanding, however, it is also presented as an industrial wasteland fraught with poverty and limited opportunities. The comparison of Little Village/Pilsen with other – more glamorous – parts of Chicago and the city's wealthy suburbs raises questions about the connection between immigrant status and exposure to industrial waste and pollution. The question that I would like to explore in this presentation is thus whether unhealthy, polluted environment is constituted in selected fictions as a corollary to twentieth-century immigration from Central and East Europe.

**Environmental (In)Justice in Alejandro Morales' Novel
*The Rag Doll Plagues***

Stanislav Kolář

University of Ostrava, Ostrava, Czech Republic

In many parts of this world, a violation of environmental justice is the consequence of colonialism and its legacy, as demonstrated in the novel *The Rag Doll Plagues* (1992) by Chicano (Latinx) writer Alejandro Morales. The novel itself has three specific temporal and spatial settings, unified by the central motif of a widespread pandemic disease that occurs in different periods of the history of Mexican and partly American people. This paper examines the metaphorical meanings of the pandemic, seen in a social, historical, and ecological context. The plague named La Mona (1st part), AIDS (2nd part) and a new unknown disease Blue Buster in the 3rd dystopian section, set in future, are interpreted as the result of the Spanish and Anglo-American colonialism and neocolonialism, and in ecological reading of this novel as a product of pollution and toxicity, caused by an uncontrolled lethal waste. Simultaneously, the focus is on the racial and ethnic aspects of Morales's novel that stand behind environmental injustice. It shows how racial discrimination and exploitation of the earth result in the highest mortality of the native population, decimated by the "rag doll plagues" in unhealthy living conditions due to its exposure to toxic pollution. An equal attention is paid to the protagonist's effort to remedy the social and ecological ills,

represented by the deadly infectious diseases in their various forms, and to the thematic merging of all three interconnected storylines.

The Memory of the Land: Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* or *The Evening Redness in the West*

Kateřina Kovářov

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Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

Cormac McCarthy's fifth novel, *Blood Meridian* or *The Evening Redness in the West*, describes a story of a gang of scalphunters hired by the government in the era of the westward expansion. McCarthy's vision of history and advancement of American civilization does not correspond with the nationwide myth of victorious process claiming the promised land. His revisionist view narrates a different story, a story of conquest, destruction, and environmental catastrophe. The novel's landscape imagery destabilizes the ethos of the West and the intersections of nature and culture become mementos of the omnipresent violence eternally captured in time as the landscape itself becomes a means of narration.

Employing the discourse of the new western history, particularly its attention to remnants of civilization co-constructing the landscape, combined with the ecocritical principle of human accountability to nature, this paper intends to demonstrate the significance of landscape and places in *Blood Meridian* which exceeds from a mere setting to an inseparable element of the narrative as it becomes a landscape of national memory of drastic conquest and trauma.

'I kin turn you ter a tree': Magical Trees and Deforestation in Two Stories by Charles W. Chesnut

Christopher E. Koy

University of South Bohemia, eske Budejovice, Czech Republic

In “Po’ Sandy” (“Poor Alexander”) and “The Marked Tree,” written by African American writer Charles W. Chesnutt, two enslaved conjure women employ the tree in a supernatural attempt to achieve dignity and freedom from slavery of a spouse in “Po’ Sandy” and revenge for the cruel death of a son in “The Marked Tree.” In one story, Tenie fails to free her husband, who as a metamorphosed pine tree, like millions of trees in the Reconstruction South, was felled and sliced up by a lumber company in gruesome dismemberment, graphically reenacting the lynching of black men. In the second story, a conjured oak tree, later designated by the plantation owner as a “Upas” tree, kills off the entire Spencer clan i.e., multiple generations of master Aleck Spencer. His slave Phillis conjures a huge oak tree in front of the master’s big house to kill every member of the Spencer family that comes close to it. Phillis commits retribution for Aleck Spencer for selling her son Isham to pay for a family wedding; Isham died as a direct consequence. These ‘voodoo’ tales express more than an unrealistic wish by slaves for unattainable justice. While the tall majestic trees were cut down in both tales, reflecting deaths of many people during the era of slavery, Chesnutt places short-term profit by lumberyards against longer-term welfare of the local environment’s ecosystem as a backdrop to the unquenchable greed of the wealthy, thereby blurring the deforestation in North Carolina and the plight of slaves.

Milk Colonialism: Indigenous Women's and Nonhuman Animals' Bodies as Colonized Territories

Denisa Krásná

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Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

The paper explores the concept of milk colonialism from an ecofeminist milk studies perspective. The world-renowned ecofeminist scholar and activist, Vandana Shiva, argues that modern agricultural techniques have colonized life itself, with the bodies of women and nonhuman animals serving as the last frontiers. This paper applies ecofeminist and vegan studies lens to shed light on the entangled oppression of Indigenous women's and nonhuman animals' bodies as colonized territories exploited for profit through the control of their reproductive cycles. The paper traces the history of animal colonialism in North America, which has been integral to the colonial expansionist project, causing mass extinction of free-living animals and environmental degrada-

tion. With traditional plant-based Indigenous foodways dismissed as inferior and inadequate, Indigenous peoples have been forced to accept the colonial assimilationist food system, deepening their dependency on the settler state and causing various health problems. The paper shows how milk and meat have been used as colonial tools for gender and racial discrimination, with milk serving as a symbol of white supremacy. To resist violent industrial animal farming practices built on racist rhetoric, some Indigenous as well as African American scholars, artists, and activists propose Indigenous veganism as an act of political resistance. Introducing their perspectives, the paper emphasizes the importance of returning to pre-colonial foodways to decolonize and address environmental destruction as well as anthropocentrism and colonial gender violence.

**Place, Environment and Latino/a Identity in Kali
Fajardo-Anstine's *Sabrina & Corina***

Jaroslav Kušnír

University of Prešov, Prešov, Slovakia

In her short story collection, *Sabrina & Corina*, Kali Fajardo-Anstine depicts mostly Latina characters of indigenous background living and travelling in the American West and the Southwest. In all the stories, place and the environment plays an important role in the construction of cultural identity of these characters that is influenced by their indigenous background, a specificity of the American West, its culture and environment, as well as a contemporary (modern) American culture. This paper will analyze Fajardo-Anstine's depiction of a specificity of place, especially of the American West and its environment and its role in a construction of Latino/a cultural identity in a modern American society as manifested especially in Fajardo-Anstine's stories *Any Further West* and *Sabrina & Corina*. At the same time, the paper will point out Fajardo-Anstine's construction of cultural identity that is rather not essentialist but close to Bill Ashcroft's concept of the transnation.

Hearing the Trees Speak – Preserving Humanity and the Natural World in a Post-Apocalyptic Future

Ivan Lacko

Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia

Kate Wilhelm's 1976 novel *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* shifts the discourse about the significance of ethnicity, race, or nationality in the context of failing (or failed) global environment by introducing cloning as the solution for humans to survive on Earth after a cataclysmic event. In the narrative, which meets the theoretical requirements of what Amit Marcus calls "clone narratives" (2012), the author examines the consequences of cloning, which is initially used to ensure the survival of humanity, but ultimately leads to ethical dilemmas that challenge traditional notions of individuality, identity, and the relationship between humans and nature.

Despite the fact that, as John Harris suggests (2013), the ethical intricacies of cloning in the novel can be justified by the fact that it is used to preserve the human genome, the process of creating an artificially made category of humans results in their alienation from one another and, more importantly, from the natural world. Readers may experience both the Freudian "uncanny" feeling when reading about clones, but this is juxtaposed by characters who have retained their bonds with nature and become a source of hope for humanity. The "framework of otherness", as discussed by John Marks (2010) in relation to the attitude towards cloned beings, is both confirmed and challenged in Wilhelm's narrative. As a result, the novel offers many perspectives how people (or clones?) can maintain a sense of self and connection to the world in the face of technological and environmental upheaval.

"Now That the Buffalo's Gone": Buffy Sainte-Marie as Singer-Songwriter and Activist

David Livingstone

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

Buffy Sainte-Marie is a First Nation/Native American folk singer and activist. Born in 1941 to Cree parents, she was taken from her family as a toddler as part of the so-called Sixties Scoop. She grew up and received her education

in the States and launched her music career in 1964 with her first album *It's My Way*, which included two of her classic songs: *The Universal Soldier* (an anti-war anthem) and *Now That the Buffalo's Gone* (a protest song about the genocide of Native Americans). Her third record, *Little Wheel Spin and Spin*, contained her arguably most influential song *My Country 'Tis of Thy People You're Dying*, a scathing indictment of the treatment of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Her recordings and performances have continued up until the present-day and have included an Oscar nomination in 1983 for her song *Up Where We Belong*. Sainte-Marie was also among the first to make use of synthesizers in her recordings.

Alongside her musical career, Buffy Sainte-Marie has been a pioneer in representation of Native Americans on television, specifically on the groundbreaking children's program *Sesame Street*, where she, among other things, broke new ground by breastfeeding her child on camera. Battling throughout her career with censorship and prejudice, she continues up to the present to use her music and person to fight for Native American rights and education.

Chief Logan's Blood Quantum and the Vanishing Race

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In his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) Thomas Jefferson admirably quotes "Logan's Lament", an elegiac speech of a Native chief, who claims that after his family was killed by the white settlers "[t]here runs not a drop of my blood in the veins of any living creature". The speech and Jefferson's admiration stand at the beginning of the romanticization of the Natives in the Early Republic, which developed in the decades and centuries to follow and played an important role in the shaping of the American national identity. The paper will examine how the poetic casting of the identity of Native Americans as that of the "vanishing race" was an important part of the search of the identity of the newly formed American nation, how the romantic elegiac idealization of the Natives proved a useful tool in their destruction, and how the stereotypes created in the era of Thomas Jefferson still play a problematic role in today's culture.

"What would Dr. King do if he were alive today?": Being a Black Teenager in Contemporary US Society in *Dear Martin* (2017) by Nic Stone

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Young people in the US have been integral to pushing conversations about the recent unjustified killings of black men to the forefront. While such might be well-known, and despite the fact that the body of YA books exploring racial injustice and police brutality is growing, conversations often concentrate on fatal consequences. Nic Stone's debut novel, however, offers a penetrating look at the mind of a black teenage boy coping with feelings of defeat and isolation as he is grasping how little society values him in ways that are subtler and harder to detect than a murder. Written as a reaction to the murder of young African-Americans, and partially based on the author's own experience, Stone's novel follows in the footsteps of a black scholarship student attending the mostly white Braselton Preparatory Academy in Atlanta, Georgia, who attempts to make sense of life as a black teenager in the current US political climate. Despite his academic prowess, Justyce McAllister soon finds out that there is no 'earning' one's way out of racism and thus begins writing letters to the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, asking himself what the American Baptist minister and civil rights activist would do in the face of the pervasive racial profiling that permeates so much of American culture. The proposed contribution builds upon research on cognitive cultural science by Patrick C. Hogan in that it questions how Stone imagines African-American identity compared to identity of the white majority—understood as universal, democratic egalitarianism—in the face of the nation's clear and often brutal inequalities of race, sex, and sexuality.

Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Dawn Quigley's *Apple in the Middle* (2018)

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One set of norms on which racial and ethnic differences emerge involves those that relate to incorporationism. Certain minorities, such as African-Americans and Latinx, are more likely to believe that blending into the larger

society and maintaining the cultural traditions of one's ancestors are not mutually exclusive and that both are very important factors which define being American. Many Indigenous NA communities, however, engage in an "oppositional process" by which the boundaries between Indians and the dominant groups are maintained. They attempt to reconstruct their identity, and are reviving languages, bringing back ceremonies, regaining land and cultural items. The reconstitution of identity is an important component of reconciliation, but some have claimed that possible loss might be greater and irretrievable. The questions then are: How to uphold Indigenous values and highlight authentic perspectives, where does subjective identity and registered national identity end? Is identity changeable or adaptable? This proposed contribution will seek answers to these questions in Dan Quigley's novel *Apple in the Middle* (2018). It portrays a view of America and its people from a double-outsider's perspective of a mixed teenager, who becomes a definitive interpreter and proponent of Native identity, shatters Indian stereotypes and learns what it means to find her place in a world divided by colour. Thus, the novel lends itself to fascinating insight into how America is portrayed by minority and isolated groups. Employing such means, it redresses the grievance that NA perspective on heritage, ancestry, and community is still largely unknown and often seen as illegitimate.

Gentrification as a Metaphor for the Family Crisis in *Halsey Street* by Naima Coster

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The article explores the relationship between people and the places they live in, depicted in the novel *Halsey Street* (2017) by Naima Coster. The novel chronicles the wave of gentrification in Brooklyn's Bed-Stuy and its effect on African and Latinx residents. The paper demonstrates how urban revival influences the characters' sense of belonging, neighborliness, and multiple identities. The changing landscape of Brooklyn causes a crisis of community belonging among the marginalized long-time residents of the neighborhood. The affluent white families represent the displacement of people of color. Gentrified are just concerned with maintaining their identity but do not have access to the same resources as gentrifiers, using housing as their status symbol. The new Brooklyn aesthetic undermines the rich African cultural vibe

and privileges whiteness. The homecoming Afro-Caribbean protagonist no longer feels at home in her neighborhood. She has deep roots in the community, but her exposure to other experiences gives her things in common with the newcomers to her district; thus, she is caught in a space between gentrifier and gentrified. Coster's novel is also a family saga capturing the weight of familial obligation when a person with creative interests does not develop as an artist but instead has to focus on the family, evolving under the pressure of gentrification. The protagonist attempts to define her place within her family, neighborhood, and artistic community.

A Strategy of Survival: Flânerie as Commoning and Co-Creating Futures in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*

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Whereas the traditional flâneur surrenders to the intoxication of the commodity, this essay develops an alternative notion of Black queer flânerie. It interprets Lauren Olamina's walk within the dystopian landscape of *Parable of the Sower* as emergent strategy, adrienne maree brown's radical guide to healing ourselves and our planet. Brown is influenced by Butler's literary speculations about our human relationship to change and our desire to shape the futures we want to live. Inspired by such Black feminist futures, the essay posits that walking teaches Olamina to envision and practice the materialist ecofeminist spirituality that ultimately births the Earthseed community and transforms the collective's relationships with humans and other-than-human beings. Whereas the security of the Parisian flâneur's unconstrained movements is predicated on the rights of Sylvia Wynter's "Man," Olamina's flight from Robledo is accompanied by pain, loss, precarity, and a multitude of life-threatening circumstances. For her tribe of predominantly non-white and varyingly traumatized individuals, traveling north is a matter of survival, where their life expectancy depends on how well they navigate a world of violence, scarcity, catastrophe, and anarchy. Informed by histories of capture, forced migration, and dislocation across the Atlantic and within the United States, the paper conceptualizes a form of flânerie that centers Black geographies of fugitivity and flight. In doing so, it ponders the following questions: How can we understand mobilities not marked by individualism, but instead grounded in the vulnerabilities of sociality, and the

ever-changing perils and possibilities of co-creation? In particular, how does Olamina and her fellow travelers' hyperempathy syndrome break with disembodied and individualized forms of knowledge production and transmission? Furthermore, what kinds of adaptations, interconnections, and intimacies does the emergent Earthseed community's otherwise flânerie spawn?

“All that matters is the now ...” Nature and Dystopia

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Traditionally, dystopia is associated with the image of an awful place in which society is often controlled by an oppressive regime and in which a strict hierarchy is enforced. Such images can be found not only in the literary genre of dystopia, but also in dystopian television and films depicting decaying cities and destruction, mass extinction and apocalypse or a civilization on the verge of total collapse. Recently, there has been an increasing number of dystopian narratives that do not focus predominantly on the political aspect and hierarchy, as can be seen in the “traditional” dystopias, but rather tend to move towards and reorient their focus on nature. Without a doubt, our current society is facing a growing and worsening climate and ecological/environmental crisis associated with issues such as overpopulation of the Earth, global warming, pollution, man-made changes in ecosystems resulting in shrinking boundaries between nature and humans and many other dramatic changes. The presented paper will focus on ecocriticism in dystopia and the emergence of eco-dystopia. It will outline the definition of eco-dystopia and its latest trends, focusing not on literature, as is often the case, but on television and cinematographic eco-dystopia and its relationship with and depiction of nature. The aim is to point out that the recent audiovisual dystopias tend to focus more on nature and, through these images, raise awareness of the ecological issues and climate change, warning their viewers that the time to act is now for all of us.

Finding Nature as a Refugee

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This proposed conference paper examines images of the natural world in the poetry of Austrian writers who fled Nazism just prior to the Second World War. While most often based in New York City or in larger towns within the area on college campuses, these authors often found respite in places like the Catskills and upstate New York, where they composed poems seemingly idyllic and pastoral. The proposed paper examines subtler (and sometimes not so subtle) resonances of themes that had affected their lives in Europe before they became refugees: US genocide, racism, and the isolation of the individual in a highly individual-focused society.

Works to be considered include Friedrich Maria Zweig's "Winter Dream," Maria Berl-Lee's "In the Catskills" and Mimi Grossberg's unpublished verse on a racist lynching in the rural US South. The paper teases apart images in these works which reflect on not only the authors' concerns with contemporary and historical US social justice (and injustice), but with how their perceptions of these issues were formed by their experiences as persecuted Jews in under the German Reich of the 1930s.

"Its crystal depths were there no longer": Coal Mining in John Fox's *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*

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Because of its immense wealth in natural resources, southern Appalachia's relationship with America has often been described in colonial terms. The mountaineers of Appalachia were often compared to other "lower" races such as Native Americans or enslaved blacks and some commentators even considered them to be of a separate race. Late nineteenth-century local color writers such as William Wallace Harney, Mary Murfree and John Fox significantly contributed to the creation of stereotypes that would influence the public image of Appalachia for decades to come. This paper aims to examine the colonial and environmental themes present in John Fox's *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908). In his bestselling novel, Fox explores the

impact of coal mining boom on the community of feuding mountaineers of eastern Kentucky, becoming the first author to foreshadow the devastation that mining would bring to the region.

Deserts, Natives, and Sylvan Cities: Russian Turkestan in American Travel Writing, 1890s-1910s

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At the turn of nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Russian Empire and the United States, both undergoing rapid economic and social changes, were reconsidering mutual relations as well as images of one another, and travel writing played a significant role in cultural interactions between the two countries and image formation. While travelling extensively in other regions of Russia, including Siberia and the Caucasus, at the turn of the century American travelers took increasing interest in current condition and prospects of Turkestan, conquered by Russia in between 1860s and late 1880s, and its peoples, for whom in retrospect the Russian conquest turned out to be one of defining events in history of Central Asia. This paper analyzes two American travelogues: *Siberia and Central Asia* (1899) by Ohio industrialist and philanthropist John W. Bookwalter, who undertook an extensive trip across Russia in 1898, exploring the Caucasus, travelling along the Trans-Siberian Railroad as well as visiting major Turkestan cities. The other book, *Turkestan: "The Heart of Asia"*, written by journalist of Chicago Record-Herald William E. Curtis, who spent spring and summer of 1910 travelling throughout the region. The article aims to examine descriptions of Turkestan nature, local peoples such as Kirgiz and Turkmens, as well as impressions made by major cities and level of urban vegetation. Besides, it focuses on prospects of Turkestan's development as seen by two Americans as well as their thoughts on colonial and imperial policies of Russia in Central Asia.

Understanding Trees: Deforestation and Richard Power's Econovel *The Overstory*

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According to Dana Phillips the environmental science has now reached the state of postmodernism as it abandoned the holistic notions of nature in favour of fragmentation. The new concept of "lowly patch" (Donald Worster) suspiciously resembles Lyotard's postmodernist stress on localism. If this is really so, then postmodernism and poststructuralism have anticipated the change of paradigm in environmentalism, we have a good reason to expect that literary fiction may not just reflect the contemporary reality but also anticipate future trends, or trends we actually experience. If Theory can do it, what about fiction? Can fiction be, occasionally, ahead of science and foster new ideas? This is the task of this paper.

My case study is deforestation as one of the frequent worries in environmental science and recently also in American literary fiction. A number of American writers picked this theme or at least touched up it, and some of them surprisingly quite early – J. F. Cooper' in his third novel *The Pioneers* (1823), H. D. Thoreau in his essays, then the environmental writers such as Edwin Muir. However, in the 20th century this topic has not found its way to major works of fiction until quite recently – e.g. the monumental saga *The Barkskins* by Annie Proulx, a family chronicle of woodcutters and lumberjack covering the span of several centuries. However, the most ambitious work so far written on this topic, is *The Overstory* (2018), a Pulitzer winner, by Richard Powers. Using the method of narrative mosaic, it depicts the lives of several characters whose lives were shaped by trees. More than half of these characters are Ethnic Americans. I shall try to situate this novel in relation to the two main paradigmatic frames, holism and localism, find out how ethnicity may affect this positioning, and reveal whether there is any novelty in Power's approach to the topic and in his proposed solutions to massive deforestations in the U.S.A.

Cyberpunk Visions of Racialized Environmental Exploitation in *Sleep Dealer*

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The economic and social dimensions of the Mexico-U.S. border make up a topic frequently discussed within the field of North American Studies. Such studies typically concern the exploitative labor and immigration policies of the United States, which negatively shape the experiences of Mexican laborers crossing the border in search of better wages and work opportunities. They also importantly consider the impact of exploitative economic imperialism upon the natural resources of local Mexican communities. Such research, however, often overlooks the power of cultural products such as film to comment upon these topics. As the following analysis of the Mexican film *Sleep Dealer* (2008) illustrates, film and, more specifically, cyberpunk cinema act as important vehicles through which complex commentaries on the environmental racism consistently characterizing Mexico-U.S. relations may be developed and presented.

As this analysis will emphasize, *Sleep Dealer* comments uniquely upon such cases of environmental racism through its extrapolation into the future of current U.S. corporate practices within Mexican communities. More specifically, the film considers the impact of neoliberal policies upon local natural resources. A key plot detail in *Sleep Dealer* is the ownership and control of local water sources within Mexico by U.S. corporations. The climax of the film involves the efforts of radical political activists to disrupt this business practice and return ownership of this vital natural resource to the local communities. Simultaneously, the film emphasizes entertainment platforms as a means by which such racist, environmentally exploitative acts are normalized. In this way, the film identifies neoliberal acts of economic imperialism as central to the environmental racism typifying U.S. corporate practices south of the border. As this paper will illuminate, *Sleep Dealer* and the cyberpunk subgenre more broadly offer a unique and powerful approach to critiquing such economically and environmentally exploitative business models.

We Own This City: Corruption, Bureaucracy, and Reform in the American City

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David Simon and George Pelecanos' mini-series *We Own This City* explores the corruption of the Gun Trace Task Force in Baltimore during the 2010s. This six-episode series, created by the same team behind *The Wire*, offers insightful observations about the nature of American policing and raises critical questions about power dynamics and abuses of power in law enforcement.

This paper will provide an in-depth analysis of the mini-series and its relevance to contemporary American society. Specifically, it will explore how the series portrays the intersection of race and policing, highlighting the challenges of reforming a system that appears fundamentally flawed. Additionally, the paper will examine the themes of spatial domination and territorial control invoked by the series' title by questioning what it means to "own the city" and on whose terms such ownership happens. While the notion of ownership is understood metaphorically, the series' portrayal of actual, well-documented events provides material for addressing questions beyond police corruption, such as the systemic problems of American institutions affecting the quality of life in American cities.

The paper will describe the series as a timely reminder of the need for police reform. It will also argue that its exploration of systemic issues offers insights into the related problems of institutions that are embedded in and affect American urban environments.

The Past and the Legacy: Hawthorne's Fiction and the Myth of New England

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Four waves of English-speaking immigrants settled in the New World between 1629 and 1775. The hopes and plans of the individual pilgrims within the particular group eventually merged into a normative structure of values and concepts, into a certain ideology typical for the regional community. Moreover, since these communities shared different kinds of features and

their identities became defined by them, it is possible to describe them as nations.

This paper shall address the nation established through the migration of English Puritans to the New England area. The main focus will be, however, on Nathaniel Hawthorne, who captures the post-Puritan world, but does it by making a direct connection with the first settlers, those individual pilgrims. Works like *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables* and selected short stories from *Twice Told Tales* will be the main texts for analysis. Hawthorne that shall be presented will, on the one hand, be a regional historian because of his depiction of the past, or rather his historically constructed version of reality. On the other hand, he shall be seen as a cultural anthropologist who records the Puritan intellectual legacy. By examining these two roles of Hawthorne, the paper will observe the myth of New England and argue to which extent he contributed to its development.

Reproduction, Animalization, and the Alien Reality of Eco-Apocalypse: Octavia E. Butler's *Dawn* from an Ecofeminist Perspective

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When it comes to the genre of dystopian and utopian science fiction, Octavia Estelle Butler ranks among the most respected authors, similarly as Ursula K. Le Guin or Margaret Atwood. There is, however, an important element that should never be overlooked when analysing Butler's work: she was the first science fiction author to introduce environmental themes in her novels, from the perspective of an African American woman. Apart from addressing the failures of political systems and social hierarchies, Butler also provides both her characters and her readers with an opportunity to take upon a journey through the post-apocalyptic world. In her acclaimed novel *Dawn* (1987), the first of her Xenogenesis series, Butler describes a human world which is destroyed in a nuclear war — and one of the survivors, the female protagonist Lilith Iyapo, is chosen to save the human race. Using an ecofeminist perspective, this paper aims to critically evaluate the (re)-production and subsequent animalization and naturalization of women which play a pivotal role in Lilith's post-apocalyptic journey. I argue that in *Dawn*, Butler, even though she removes her protagonist from Earth, questions the hierarchical behaviour of both human and alien society, as well as

subsequent dualism in the relationship between women and nature, including animals. While most studies analysing Butler's novels focus primarily on the dystopian and utopian features of her work, and to a lesser extent on the analysis of the post-apocalyptic world, this paper adopts a different perspective by analysing *Dawn* from an ecofeminist perspective. It is ecofeminism that addresses both the origin and impact of the centuries-old connection between women and nature, can both empower and stigmatize women as being closer to nature, yet allow them no control of it.

Between Mastery of the Environment and the Culture of Fear-Shifting American Values in a Slovak Context

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The turn of the 21st century has brought along a shift in the American way of thinking about the nature and the human relationship with the natural environment. Strengthening civic and political environmental movements have found ways to confront the public, the representatives of industries and political actors with the direct and the anticipated consequences of the excessive exploitation of natural resources. Primarily the generations borne in the first decades of the 21st century demonstrate strong affiliation with the new environmentalist movements and the American youth has drifted towards a more radical—sometimes destructive—ways of environmental activism. This movement has spread around the world and did not leave the Slovaks untouched. To what extent do the new generations of Slovak teenagers and young adults follow and associate with the American view of environmental radicalism is the focus of this investigation. We look into the process of Americanization and anti-Americanism among the Slovak youth and by implementing methods from the repertoire of social sciences make an effort to measure to what extent does the *culture of fear* influence the new generations' way of thinking.

Teaching US Racial Relations Today: Transnational Readings of Toni Morrison's "Recitatif"

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"It is increasingly the case that students in my Southern literature classes at Emory don't always know who is 'black' and who is 'white,' writes Barbara Ladd in her article "Reading William Faulkner after the Civil Rights Era" (2015). The upsurge of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 and the recent debates on how race is discussed at schools and universities add additional layers to the complex issue of teaching, talking about, and reading race as a concept and a lived reality – both in the US but also in American Studies and US literature courses outside of the North American continent. This paper reads Toni Morrison's only short story "Recitatif" (1983) transnationally to explore these dynamics from the perspective and position of a Czech university classroom, arguing that the outside perspective highlights the notions of race with which the readers approach a literary text. It draws on current debates in critical race theory and critical whiteness studies, experiments with racial discourses and distant reading, and reconsiderations in the field of race and pedagogy to look at how race is decoded within a specific time and place, from a narrative that purposefully removes all racial codes while racial identities, realities, and discourses shape the lives of the two protagonists, Twyla and Roberta. This decoding also takes place within a specific environment and often builds on sources like popular culture, current media, and also the information provided by us, American studies and US literature scholars based in Central Eastern Europe. The underlying issue of this paper is also the position and positionality of these mediators of the US, US culture, and US racial relations in this space today.

Identity Structure in the Kaleidoscopic Chronotope of American Society: Double Consciousness of Herman Silk in *The Human Stain*

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This paper translates U.S. environment in terms of chronotope—a literary theory introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin to literary criticism—by studying Philip Roth’s novel, *The Human Stain* (2000). It is discussed how spatial-temporal variants of American society and culture intervene in the development of Roth’s characters who mainly come from ethnic minorities. To do so, the double consciousness of characters is studied as a polyphonic reaction to the vectors of power emerging from social norms, cultural traditions, and translinguistic factors of the American society. Examining the behavior of Roth’s characters in different chronotopic environments furnishes the context to explain the dialogue existing between environment and people. It is finally discussed how and why the consciousness of human beings in general and Rothian characters in particular is doubled as they face the opposing values of an environment in which they are situated.

“What would a straight girl do?” A Lovers Guide to the Disorienting World or How to Cross the Borders, and Remain Intact

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The Lesbian’s Guide to Catholic School (2022), Sonora Reyes’s first novel, poignantly taps on significant topics a young adult growing up in the [still] racially, and socially divided United States stumbles upon. The themes like religion, friendship, family dynamics, and self-acceptance reconnect Reyes’s novel with a larger body of writing that portray their teenage characters on the threshold of teenage preoccupations and adult world responsibilities questioning the beliefs, and assumptions the world of adults offers for them, grappling at the same time with their own sense of worth, and appreciation.

For Yamilet Flores, a sixteen-year-old Mexican kid and the protagonist of the novel, it means that she decides to retain a flawless surface similar to her perfect foundation she wears, and survive years of high school as a closeted lesbian until she can eventually set herself free to the world of adults. She is on a run from falling-in-love situations, however, as it often happens she runs into the very same situation she wants to escape from. After going through an unrequited first crush she transfers to Slayton Catholic, a high school with predominantly white, affluent students.

The power of the novel to present complex, and often disturbing topics such as homophobia, religious trauma, racial stereotypes, disownment,

mental health, cultural appropriation, or deportation rests in the author's use of linguistic and stylistic structures, such as situational humour or irony, for example, to create a captivating reading experience. The experiential world of the protagonist is presented in a series of chapters titled as commandments, and they go beyond number 10 because Yamila's experience goes beyond the ethical framework of Christian commandments. At the same time the book is introduced to the reader as an instruction manual. In deeply disorienting and fragmented situations Yamila grasps for the structural support of a hypothetical question: "What would a straight girl do?" In such a way her identity in the context of her high school environment "not only indicates a minority [group] but interpellates a dominant other." (Franco, Dean. "Re-Placing the Border in Ethnic American Literature. 2002, p. 108) Therefore the text becomes contesting ground for customary positions whether they are occupied by a dominant or a marginalised group; their stability questioned not only "in response to the gaze of the other" as Franco argues but also dismantled by language structures inherent to the text. By the end of the novel the character of Yamila takes over the responsibility for her own life, and by loving another girl she finds a way to love herself as well. The last chapter of the novel "... Me Amo Y Respeto Yo" [... I love and Respect Myself] echoes Gloria Anzaldúa's struggle for a definition and recognition of herself, a result of both: an insurrection and resistance: "And someone in me takes into our own hands, and eventually, takes dominion over serpents—over my own body, my sexual activity, my soul, my mind, my weaknesses and strengths. Mine. Ours." (*Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 2nd ed., San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987, p. 51).

When Environmentalists Go Bad: The Racist Implications of Anti-Industrial Philosophy

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This presentation will explore the relationship between a particular school of environmentalism and the social construction of racist thinking. There are prominent Anglo-American environmentalists who were, or might once have been, associated with the political left, but who seem to have moved sharply "rightward." Notable examples are two British activists, Russell Brand and Paul Kingsnorth, along with Kingsnorth's associates on his "Dark Mountain" project.

Their motivation seems to be despair over industrial civilization and an increasing certainty that it stands to destroy the planet. In the most extreme (and quite possibly psychotic) case, Theodore Kaczynski, the American “Unabomber,” became a hermit and fugitive attempting to carry out serial murders in pursuit of an anti-industrial vision he propounded in a lengthy manifesto. Kingsnorth has not turned to violence, but his own co-authored manifesto calls for a great project of “Uncivilizing,” or in effect de-populating and re-wilding the earth while dispossessing human civilization altogether.

Ideas like these align with racism inasmuch as they hyper-privilege “nature” at the expense of human politics. As Hannah Arendt, Ivan Hannaford and others have written, racism involves treating people as biological rather than political beings – assigning their status to nature or “mere givenness,” as Arendt put it. Only within political communities can people become citizens with rights. Intentionally or not, therefore, the “former environmentalist right” lends philosophical aid and comfort to racist and alt-right causes. This has disturbing implications for a future in which environmental disruptions might well create more refugees and “stateless persons” of the kind that Arendt saw as leading to totalitarianism and the Holocaust.

Ecocritical Resonances in *Scarecrow* by Every House Has a Door

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Scarecrow (2017), a performance by the Chicago-based performance company Every House Has a Door, explores amongst many other aspects the relationship between humans and the environment, and the impact of industrialization on the natural world. Via the themes of displacement, environmental destruction, and the loss of traditional ways of life, *Scarecrow* invites the audience to consider their own relationship with the natural world and their place within it through the company’s idiosyncratic use of language, movement, and imagery.

The performance emphasizes the importance of community and collective action in responding to environmental challenges. Through its use of collaboration and collective storytelling, *Scarecrow* emphasizes the need for cooperation and mutual support in addressing environmental issues. In my

paper, I argue that this cooperation results from ecocritical approach deeply rooted in American consciousness from Transcendentalism to 21st century.

In my analysis I elaborate both on the temporal aspect of the piece, its "chronopoetics," as well as phenomenological understanding of 21st century performance theatre projects. My paper demonstrates that *Scarecrow* as representative of research theatre, highlights the impact of environmental degradation on human communities and the need for sustainable practices that prioritize the health and well-being of both humans and the environment.

My conclusion suggests that through its exploration of themes of displacement, environmental destruction, and the importance of community and collective action 21st century performance can be seen as a critique of the damaging effects of industrialization on the environment and a call to action for more sustainable glocal practices.

Double Consciousness and the Environment in Colson Whitehead's Novels

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The paper aims to analyze Colson Whitehead's representations of spaces in his 2016 novel *The Underground Railroad*, considering both metaphorical concepts of underground spaces and the portrayal of the harsh fictional reality of slavery. The metaphorical concept of the underground railroad may be understood as a reflection of the double consciousness which embodies the idea of escapism, the search for one's identity and the desire for freedom while overcoming physical strivings and the traumatic experience of the life on the plantation. Du Bois' sense of double consciousness will be introduced with respect to the space perception of the main protagonists who move in the space of the American South on their way to escape from slavery. The emphasis on the confined spaces of the retreats will be contrasted with the concept of open spaces of a variety of American states and the landscape devastated by the racial conflict and migration. The main focus of the analysis centers upon the character's movement in space in search of independence, reflecting the painful self-consciousness of the main protagonist and the subconscious desire to find a peaceful place which would define the sense of one's home and family. Whitehead's concept of space in *The Underground Railroad* may additionally be confronted with the

space perception of the main protagonist of Whitehead's novel *The Nickel Boys* (2019). The confined spaces, the theme of imprisonment, and the sense of double identity will be discussed in the final comparative analysis of the two novels.

Marilynne Robinson on the Environment

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At a time when Christian environmental organizations are being set up and active and environmental concern is gradually receiving hearing in American churches except perhaps the most fundamentalist circles, the acclaimed Protestant novelist, essayist, and longtime teacher at the Iowa Writers' Workshop Marilynne Robinson seems to pay considerably little attention to environmental thought. Besides her early non-fiction work *Mother Country* (1989), which exposed and argued against nuclear pollution at the Sellafield nuclear site in the UK, there is only one of out Robinson's many essays which deals explicitly with the natural world and human attitude to the environment ("Wilderness," 1998) and even there she fails, it seems to some readers, to make a straightforward argument for environmental action. And yet nature is a very important theme in Robinson's fiction, present in all of her five novels and particularly prominent in two. The story of *Housekeeping* (1980) is nothing short of dominated by its natural setting; throughout *Lila* (2014) the natural world is an alternative home to its fragile main protagonist.

The paper will explore Robinson's treatment of the theme of the natural world in her essay and the two novels mentioned above, and address the seeming discrepancy between the importance of the literary role of nature in Robinson's fiction and what seems to be a curious absence of the environmental theme in most of her essays.

Dawnland

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"Dawnland" is a transcription of a Native word to describe what is now called the state of Maine - where the first rays of the sun touch the continental USA. "Dawnland" is also the name of an Emmy award-winning documentary film (2018) about the first Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigation into the decades-long practice of removing Native children from their homes to assimilate them into non-native society. The film explores the relationship between land, home, and culture. I will discuss the film and how the reception of the film has itself become a watershed moment for reconciliation between native and non-native cultures.

Of Ones and Zeros but Not of This Earth: 'Cyber-Paradise' against Polycrisis in Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*

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This contribution describes a novel aspect of Thomas Pynchon's oeuvre. Pynchon, known for his intricate novels that often critique capitalism, technology, and organized religion, presents a different portrayal in *Bleeding Edge* (2013). This paper shows that, unlike his earlier works, which cast both religion and technology in a more critical light, *Bleeding Edge* offers a unique synthesis of the two. In the novel, they converge to form a 'cyber-paradise' created to revitalize those who stand against the onslaught of capitalism. While the cyberparadise does show Pynchon's signature elements — some of which might be interpreted as hellish — this paper argues that the novel reframes both religion and technology as potential forces of good. This shift in perspective may be attributed to the polycrisis felt during the time of the novel's conception. The contribution concludes with a discussion of the contemporary relevance of Pynchon's nuanced approach to technology.

Interior Ghosts: The Double Bind Confinement in Richard Wright's *Native Son*

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As Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) became to represent late American urban naturalism, the influence of the gothic genre on the novel – used to figure social conflict and anxieties – further accentuates the novel's focus on individual terror rather than wider social forces. The ambiguity of using elements of the gothic bend the sociological realism of the text, and the political consciousness and development related to the African American culture associated with the rural South and urban North reveal further notions of Du Boisian double consciousness. As W.E.B. Du Bois noted, "the central problem of America after the Civil War, as before, was the black man." The beast stereotype conveyed in the novel's central character Bigger Thomas gets set in the era of massive Black disenfranchisement and legalized Jim Crow where the alienation of an individual from the white majority explores not only Bigger's internal detachment from the folk culture his mother embodies and from the Black American politicians of the Chicago's South Side, but also his external projections of self-hatred manifested in torture, rape and murder. The American gothic becomes an appropriate genre for the marginalized as it shifts to an interior ghostly presence where the figure of the devil, as Richard Devenport-Hines argues, "needs to be let loose, and likes the letting." The paper works with Elizabeth Young's Black Frankenstein metaphor and subsequent imagery of the haunted psyche of the monster combined with the United States as the monster-making machine in its racialized social stratification and inequity. The environmental inequalities between the urban gothic landscape of the poor South Side where Bigger's family lives and the affluent white neighborhood where Bigger works reveal discrepancies within Bigger's understanding of home and belonging. The paper explores to what extent Bigger attempts to interpret and control diverse environments; within the gothic, his erratic behavior resulting from uncontrollable elements of systemic racism are projected onto various objects or intertextual allusions to other literary works. Due to the confinement of African Americans within the white power structure, the supervision of the mob-rule is argued to make an understanding of the system impossible as the dread of solitary secret selves induced by mass culture challenges narratives and ghosts of the past.

Between Huck and Oliver: Auden's Views on the Meaning of America

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W. H. Auden's emigration to America in January 1939 signalled his determination to dissociate himself from the interwar literary stage and ethical positions imprinted in his work written in what he would soon call "a low dishonest decade". After his arrival, Auden started to reflect on England from an external perspective, mapping similarities and differences between his old and new homes. This paper will explore the variety of meaning the United States had for Auden in the first years after his settling in Manhattan. It will trace his tendency to define America in opposition to Europe through comparisons of the American and European imagination. This allowed Auden to establish local differences between notions of society, culture and landscape.

Climate Change, Global Warming, Human Rights, and Migration: A Perspective from Two Los Angeles Immigrant Artists of Color

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Artists of color understandably focus on racism, civil rights, and white supremacy, among many other related topics. In recent years several prominent visual artists have used their creative talents to link those concern with environmental crises, especially climate change and global warming. For several decades, I have taught, researched, and published extensively about the vibrant community of Black artists in the Los Angeles area. I have also explored the work of other Los Angeles artists of color, including those from Mexico, the Caribbean, Central, and South America. Recently, some of these women and men have focused on the ways that environmental changes have impacted the communities with which they most closely identify.

I propose to show how two of these highly creative, well recognized mid-career artists accomplish these objectives. Jamaican-born Yrneh Gabon Brown is an immigrant who has worked and produced art throughout the world. Based in LA, he has a powerful commitment to socially conscious themes. Most recently, his work addresses the nexus of ecological climate change that deals with fire and water. He has specifically addressed salt consumption and its relationship and history with people of color. He continues to create new narratives and extend dialogue between Africa and its Diaspora, both in the first and the developing world. His travels to Senegal explore the intersection of salt as a commodity in Africa and the United

States. This joins his previous efforts on albinism and the murders of Black American citizens to reflect a comprehensive artistic vision directly relevant to the Conference themes.

Argentinian-born Luciana Abait creates multimedia works addressing climate change and climate fragility, with a special and highly perceptive focus on immigration in particular. For example, her iceberg series suggests a dramatic analogy between the losses and wanderings of these giant mountainous natural objects and the isolation, displacement, and movements of populations, mostly of color, throughout the world in recent decades. Abait's works are socially conscious, highly aesthetic, and pervasively relevant to conference themes. Like Brown, she is committed to using her creative powers to engage audiences in understanding the need to engage the world's most pressing social problems.

I propose to explain the artworks of these two persons through the lens of my long work as a social art and cultural historian. That vision locates all cultural expressions in their historical, social, political, and ethical contexts. I will show selected examples of their works and invite audience responses and feedback.

Environmental Concerns (or Their Absence) in Superhero Comics

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While ecology and sustainability have become major topics of public debates and policies, the superhero stories seem strangely silent on the topic. While they are on their mission to save the world, their carbon footprint reaches enormous values. Driving special cars, like Batman, whose vehicle shoots fire, developing super modern technology to fight the villains like the Iron Man, or leading the war on (Neo)Nazis like Captain America: ecology does not play any role in the superhero world. Even though Superman flies on solar power, this fact is not emphasized. In the last decades the superhero universe has been concerned with the gender issue, producing more women or trans superheroes, still, the protection of nature and eco-system does seem to bother the super role models or their publishers. While there are minor exceptions to the rule, namely Captain Planet, Black Orchid, the Swamp Thing or Poison Ivy, yet they do not receive much attention and their actions are often destructive. Instead of focusing on the superhero's abilities and

world-saving missions, the paper will focus on the reasons behind this lack of concerns over the climate crisis, the potential of the superheroes to harm the planet, their own eco-awareness connected with choice of transport or weapons, and their potential impact on green change on their audience.

A Transgression of Interspecies Boundaries in Sheri S. Tepper's *Grass*

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Sheri S. Tepper (1929-2016), an award-winning American science-fiction, fantasy and horror writer, whose writings have been scarcely analyzed from an academic perspective, masterly ushered the readers into the realms she created. The author of a reputable novel entitled *Grass*, a part of her best-selling *Arbai* trilogy in which a pandemic of untraceable origin wreaks havoc to the whole galaxy of worlds, skillfully and prophetically conceptualized the dangers lurking on the mankind in the days to come.

The first novel of trilogy, entitled *Grass*, depicts planet Terra, the inhabitants of which struggle with overpopulation and depletion of natural resources. Equipped with advanced technology, they search for a safe heaven, dreaming of making a newly discovered planet called *Grass* their home.

With its ecofeminist tones, *Grass* is told from the female angle by Marjorie who is chosen to prepare the unexplored planet for the arrival of masses, representing a civilization governed by religious fanatics. The newcomers encounter humans whose life is governed by rituals and practices but also by regular meetings with mysterious creatures. Making effort to establish proper diplomatic contacts, they face layers of secrets related to the proper functioning of life on *Grass*.

Despite its generic classification, Tepper's science fiction tale depicts the world that resembles 21st century Earth to a large degree and marks a concern with the ethical issues arising around the development of technology.

With a didactic value added to the text, it could also be read as a strong urge to radical and immediate changes in human attitude towards nature, a warning that still after over thirty years of publication have not been treated with a much needed care.

That snippet of Tepper's oeuvre holds the unique potential as an eco-dystopia (in Callenbach's understanding), in which posthuman feminist is grappling with the ideas of transhumanism. Following the views of Donna Haraway and Elizabeth Grosz, it seems essential to acknowledge the interdependence of human and non-human elements, a theme of paramount importance to Tepper's worldbuilding, especially in the novel mentioned.

Reading John Cheever's "The Swimmer" from the Perspective of Environmental Psychology

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John Cheever, acclaimed as the "Chekhov of American suburbia" by John Leonard would be one of the greatest writers after WWII whose fictional writings convey the value of American middle class through the depiction of suburbanization. Joseph George summarizes the characteristics of his works: "frustrated longings of the middle class in the United States. . . with a pathos-laden surrealism and profound sympathy," all of which Cheever delves into are displayed in "The Swimmer."

A story of surrealism, "The Swimmer" divulges Neddy Merrill's plan to go home by swimming with a map in his mind where a river of swimming pool helps him swim home. The imaginative journey is an exploration, a relationship between the environment and human beings, a mirror reflecting American colonial settlement and westward movement. The paper aims to analyze the following episodes echoing post-war American suburbanite's ecopsychology: 1) at the Westerhazy's: alcoholism, 2) the Grahams and the Bunkers: the American Eden, 3) the Levys, 4) time passage, 5) persistence in finishing the journey, 6) social hierarchy, 7) the Hallorans, 8) Helen and Eric, 9) the Biswangers, 10) Shirley Adams, 11) the Clydes, 12) returning home.

A typical middle-class American Neddy is satisfied with his lazy Sunday morning sitting by the swimming pool at his neighbor's house; he is considered a dreamer or an escapist when he decides to swim back home but finally finds his home empty and shattered and his wife and daughter gone. Adept at the use of symbols and metaphors, Cheever hints that suburbanization could be an American dream or an American nightmare. In analysis of how Neddy interacts with his neighbors and how swimming pool is treated as the ocean or even the outer space, the paper examines Neddy's eco-

psychological representations.

Dogs and Their (Non)Traditional Depiction in Louis Erdrich's *Antelope Woman*

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Even though most of the Western world sees dogs as pets, for many indigenous communities, this master/owner-pet relationship is not perceived in the same way. Dogs as such have become an inevitable part of the Ojibwe culture in particular, as they have been involved in many areas of everyday life, both spiritual and mundane. In Louis Erdrich's novel *Antelope Woman* (2016), there are several dog characters which shape not only the fate of the individual characters but also the part of the narrative, as one of them becomes the narrator of one of the stories. This paper focuses on the role and symbolic function Erdrich assigns to the individual dogs in her novel and analyses their traditional depiction as well as the diversions from the traditional concepts.

PANELS

Boundaries of American Identity: Coming of Age in Contemporary US Minority Writing for Young Adults

When *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, the book by Gloria Anzaldúa, had come out in 1987 amidst debates on reconstructing American literary history it stirred the critical discourse on American identity, ethnicity and literature. A year before, Werner Sollors articulated the concept of American literary history based on the dialectics of descent and consent, and wherever he claimed that the literary history teaches us about the process “how Americanness is achieved, at the point of its emergence”, and how it is established again and again through the socialisation, and revitalisation, Gloria Anzaldúa described the situation where people of Aztlán without their consent were born into the United States and the “socialisation into the codes of Americanness” as Sollors would have it is their life in the borderlands. (Beyond Ethnicity, Consent and Descent in American Culture, 1986, p. 7) *Borderlands* or *La Frontera* are not only the physical borders between U.S. Southwest and Mexico Anzaldúa asserts, they are “present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.” (1987, Preface) Using a personal story Anzaldúa communicates the qualities of an existential moment when experience takes place in a liminal space and produces both the moments of encounters, thus being healing and revitalising, or division resulting in separation, alienation, and dissociation.

The aim of the panel is to examine contemporary writing for young adults as they are the group where the consequences of erecting walls, social structures and discourses of separation may impact with pressing insistence. American teenagers are the most ethnically diverse population segment in the country, with over one out of three teens belonging to a minority group (Mediamark Research Inc., 2004, p. 5). The current increasing trend in contemporary US YA fiction is therefore to deal with the ethnic experience of young adults. How does the fact of living in imaginary or physical borderlands generate their sense of belonging within a family, a group, or the country? Is their Americanness the result of growing up into the world of diverse, and often conflicting backgrounds through the process of descent or is it a consensual process of appropriating the qualities of the world strange enough to be contested? Or is it a laborious process of acquiring the balance in the world-in-between? The stories examine,

question, and undermine the cultural narratives of both dominant and marginalised groups and provide the readers with a penetrating look at forms of otherness through the eyes of teenagers. Existing between radically different stages of life young teenagers can be viewed as a looking glass disclosing diversity and complexity of growing up ethnic and national. The characters based on them are at odds with traditional views on the concept of American race and go against the grain in manifesting their religious values and beliefs. Their stories reveal what it inherently means to be at the same time from the outside and inside of social and cultural structures and get us closer to answering the question: what makes America American?

Vanishing Race: Native American Identity Question

As a nation allegedly founded on ideas rather than culture or ancestry (Hartz 1955), the country has continually struggled to determine what the conceptual boundaries of membership in the community should be. Myrdal (1944) famously wrote that American identity is based on a collection of ideals that he termed the American Creed. Endorsement of the American Creed should be a sufficient condition for membership. As long as someone accepts and abides by the creedal principles, other factors such as race, gender, national origin, class, or religion should not be grounds for exclusion. Reality, however, has thrown wrenches into this creedal perspective. Despite the fact that ascriptive Americanism has been increasingly discredited in popular and political discourse, it nonetheless continues to shape policy debates and public opinion. Given that most surveys that examine attitudes about the content of American identity rely on majority-white samples, data on other racial groups is important if one seeks to further understand the dynamics among race, ethnicity, religion, perceived typicality, and beliefs about ascriptive Americanism.

American Indians were perhaps clearly identifiable at the turn of the 20th century, but today the concept is contested. Native Americans have been defined (first by settler society, and subsequently to varying degrees and in different ways by many tribes themselves), according to the principle of “blood quantum,” and hence their identity has been understood to be always disappearing, as it was necessary for them to decrease in number, or disappear entirely, so that the expropriation of their land could be justified. To be recognized as an Indian by the US government implies some sort of recognition (or potential recognition) of rights to resources. Historically, by far the most important thing that indigenous identity has implied is some sort of

potential claim to the territory or to land, and these collective claims have threatened the material and ideological integrity of the US as a nation. Indigeneity, as Enid Logan argues, thus must be understood as foundational to US constructs of race and nation and move from the extreme margins of sociological understandings of race to the very centre. Native people may align as a group when discussing land claims, stolen generations, prohibitions on language, culture, and spirituality. Yet beneath those shared agendas and experiences lie diverse and vibrant cultures, often unknown to people outside of their communities. How do the Native Americans themselves define their identity, especially as related to questions of ascriptive Americanism? This panel seeks to provide insight into the traditional cultural perspective of American Indian identity.

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